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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7113
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001344

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/29/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: IRAQ'S VOTER REGISTRATION PROCESS

Classified By: Deputy PolCouns Ellen Germain for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

[11](#). (C) Summary: On April 29, officials from USAID implementing partner IFES updated the Embassy Elections Planning Group (EPG) on the current status of the Voter Registration Exercise (VRE), still planned for June 1-30. They described the modalities of checking the voter registry, updating, adding, or changing information in the registry, as well as the voter registration timeline and how well the Independent High Electoral Commission was tracking with the timeline to begin voter registration by June 1. The overall message was that despite obstacles, voter registration is on track to begin June 1, provided clarity on voter eligibility is forthcoming from the Council of Representatives. End Summary.

[12](#). (C) On April 29, Charles Lasham, Chief of Party and Sherif Shaker, Voter Registration Specialist, both from IFES, the USAID implementing partner providing technical assistance to the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) gave Post's Election Planning Group an overview of the status of preparations for voter registration, which is scheduled to begin on June 1. (Note: The Election Planning Group is an interagency team that meets weekly to facilitate information sharing and progress on provincial election planning. End Note.) They described to the group the method in which the provisional voter registry was created and then updated the group on the progress on the voter registration exercise scheduled to begin June 1.

PROVISIONAL VOTER REGISTRY: BRING OUT YOUR DEAD

[13](#). (C) The Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) converted the Public Distribution System (PDS - a database listing those receiving food subsidies, which is most of the population) from the antiquated Foxpro database program used by the Ministry of Trade (MoT) to an SQL database program, which allows the flexibility needed in a voter registry database. The records have been updated with information from the MoT and Ministry of Interior (MoI), along with the Ministry of Health (MoH), which provided mortality data. Unfortunately, the mortality data only include the deceased's name, which greatly reduces the value of this information. Many names in Iraq are similar or common, and without accompanying residential or family data, it is hard to discern who on the provisional voter registry could legitimately be removed from the list. Thus the voter registration exercise (VRE) is needed to give people a chance to verify the list.

TERMINOLOGY: CENTERS AND STATIONS AND UNITS, OH MY

[14](#). (C) Voters will update their voter registry information at one of 549 Voter Registration Centers (VRC) around Iraq. The VRC is based on the PDS center where the PDS registry for each PDS district is located. A polling unit corresponds to a PDS food agent (who delivers food to a specific small area). The polling units make up the polling stations. On election day, there will be multiple polling stations

composed of no more than 500 registered voters. Each station will most likely be in a room in a school. Keeping the number of voters assigned to a polling station low should lessen the amount of wait time and shorten the voting lines, decreasing the security risk. A polling center (usually a school) will be composed of four to six polling stations, in order to keep the number of voters assigned to each center between 2000 and 3000. There will be approximately 6500 polling centers composed of approximately 38,000 polling stations throughout Iraq.

15. (SBU) Iraq has a "passive" voter registration system. Every Iraqi citizen 18 years of age or older who is on the PDS list as of August 2007 is automatically on the provisional voter registry and registered to vote. During the 30-day VRE, each prospective voter or member of a household acting as a representative of the household may visit his or her assigned Voter Registration Center (VRC) to check his or her own name (or the names of family members.) If the name and registration information are correct, the prospective voter does nothing. If there is incorrect information, the prospective voter has the VRC clerk fill out a "change" form with the correct information, then signs the form and receives a copy. If the voter's name is missing, he or she has the VRC clerk fill out an "addition" form. In both instances, proper proof of identity is required. If a family member has died, a death certificate is required. Voters will be allowed to change their assigned polling unit to another without having to provide documentation, and correcting that information should not have a major impact on the demographics of a district or sub-district. If a voter wants to correct his or her assigned VRC or governorate, that will require proof of residency. During the VRE, change and addition forms will be continually collected. The data from

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the forms will be entered into the database from an offshore location (for security reasons) using a double-blind entry system that maximizes accuracy.

16. (C) Approximately one month after the VRE is completed, the provisional voter registry will again be displayed at the VRCs to enable voters who had requested corrections ensure the changes have been made. Also during this period, challenges to names other than one's own on the provisional voter registry may be made. As with the first round of the VRE, proof must be presented if one is alleging a neighbor has died or moved. The assessment as to whether or not to remove the name will be made locally at the VRC. The decision can be challenged all the way up through IHEC and an appellate court. This will act as a safeguard against neighbors of differing political parties trying to remove one another from the voter registry.

IT'S ALL IN THE TIMING

17. (C) On Saturday May 3, if the IHEC board of commissioners have given their approval, IHEC will sign a contract with a vendor in the United Arab Emirates to print the provisional voter registry list and voter update forms. It is anticipated the printing will be completed by mid-May. IHEC still needs to select a transportation vendor to transport the voter registration materials from UAE to IHEC's regional warehouses. MNF-I, which is providing technical assistance to the Supreme Council on Elections Security, says this contract should be in place sometime around mid-May. There is debate about whether or not IHEC should proceed with the voter registration exercise if the Council of Representatives (CoR) has not passed an election law. There is the small possibility that if IHEC proceeds absent a law and the voter eligibility criteria changes radically, the VRE would have to be conducted a second time, delaying elections.

18. (C) Lasham laid out the election timeline assuming the

voter registration exercise begins on time.
-- June 1-30: voter registration update period
-- August 1-10: second voter registry display period.
-- August 10-24: appeal period
-- September 1: final voter registry complete

COMMENT

19. (C) While real progress is being made on the voter registration exercise, we do not believe Iraq is out of the woods yet in overcoming obstacles to holding provincial elections by October 1. IHEC is not confident the CoR can pass a law in a timely manner. The version of the draft law approved by the Council of Ministers on May 27 and which will be considered (and possibly receive its first reading) by the CoR on May 6 contains provisions contrary to some strongly held positions by some of the political blocs in the CoR (an analysis of the draft law will be sent septel). The possibility of a prolonged political debate cannot be ruled out, and could be healthy. Aside from the law, the election deadline also runs into Ramadan and Eid-al-Fitr, which could slow down progress. Given the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs), it is hard to imagine that the second voter registry display and appeals process can be completed in less than 30 days. While publicly adhering to the much-touted October 1 deadline, we believe the actual election will probably take place closer to November 1. End Comment.
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